

Increasing Queensland's Productivity through Vocational Education and Training - ACPET Policy Statement

Education and the acquisition of the right skills are vital to Queensland's productivity and economic growth. The performance and sustainability of a contestable vocational education and training (VET) market in Queensland is critical to advancing the participation levels and productivity of the workforce and securing Queensland's prosperity.

Queensland's VET system has made significant positive changes throughout recent years. Ongoing reform needs to keep pace with the demands of ever-changing Queensland industries and the expectations of individual students.

An innovative and responsive VET system must ensure it meets the needs of all Queenslanders effectively and efficiently. The government's role is to facilitate the development of the VET sector.

Introduction

The Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) is the peak national industry body for independent providers of tertiary education and training, proudly celebrating its 23rd anniversary in 2015.

Our core purpose is to enhance and promote the role of the private tertiary education sector through strong leadership in order to achieve the highest quality educational outcomes for individuals, their employers and the public interest.

ACPET nationally represents more than 1,100 member organisations that offer a diverse range of higher education, vocational, English language and foundation courses to Australian and overseas students across all states and territories.

The private tertiary education sector is a vital part of the community, with institutions employing more than 100,000 full-time equivalent (FTE) Australians providing training to more than 1.4 million FTE people each year and making a contribution to the national economy of \$5.8 billion.

ACPET is calling on both parties contesting the 2015 Queensland state election to:

1. Invest in the future of Queenslanders by increasing the amount of expenditure on vocational education and training.
2. Further improve industry and student choice by increasing the percentage of funding available through contestable arrangements and growing the market.
3. Ensure there is a continuation of transparent and equitable access to publicly owned training assets by all providers for the purposes of education and training.
4. Acknowledge that credible industry self-regulation, combined with meeting federal and state requirements, is the best way to promote a diverse, high quality and effective VET system. ACPET members operate under a strict Code of Conduct and

Practice. ACPET membership ensures a commitment to professional development and that business, marketing and educational practices are monitored and ethically sustained.

5. Give preference to training providers that meet the requirements of industry standards as a condition of being listed as a Pre-Qualified Supplier (PQS), with a further requirement to undertake a PQS health check as a condition of entry.
6. Lead the promotion of Queensland's international education capabilities and capacity to potential students and markets both on and offshore, ensuring Queensland is identified as a safe, culturally-appropriate study destination.

Invest in the future of Queenslanders by increasing the amount of expenditure on vocational education and training.

For Queensland to meet the growing needs of the economy, it is critical for the State to continue building the right skills. Developing skills requires a growing investment from governments, students and industry.

Total operating expenditure in Queensland reduced by 9.7% from 2012 to 2013 (NCVER 2014).

This alarming trend needs to be addressed to ensure that the State builds its human capital for the future. While some of this reduction may be explained through more efficient use of funding, it is not sustainable into the future. ACPET calls for further support for the sector through government investment in vocational education and training.

Improving access to funding will better improve access to quality training places for all Queenslanders.

Additionally, it is critical that courses are delivered by highly-qualified and competent teachers and trainers. ACPET has been a predominant performer in the delivery of professional development activities across Australia for the tertiary education sector. Additional government support should be aligned to aspirations for a high quality VET sector that grows the educational professionalism and business acumen of the sector.

Further improve industry and student choice by increasing the percentage of funding available through contestable arrangements and growing the market.

The principle of choice is key to promoting greater individual and industry participation in VET and encourages providers to design and deliver more responsive, relevant courses that leads to jobs. Public funding should be aligned with choice, maximising the capacity of informed students to choose their training provider. This is fundamental to a modern, innovative and responsive VET system.

A focus on student choice has been shown to increase equity in participation, produce higher completion rates and satisfaction levels, and ensures the development of higher level skills in diverse learners – Queensland’s current and future workforce.

Increasing contestable funding will help foster a highly skilled population, boosting productivity, workforce participation and continued employability in Queensland.

Ensure there is a continuation of transparent and equitable access to publicly owned training assets by all providers for the purposes of education and training.

The commencement of the Queensland Training Asset Management Authority (QTAMA) as an independent statutory authority has been a bold yet long awaited mechanism to ensure underutilised publicly owned training facilities across Queensland are used efficiently for the benefit of all providers, students and the community.

In the short term, many students have been able to gain access to these facilities under this new infrastructure model.

The success of such an arrangement must be based on a range of foundation principles that provides equity and transparency for all providers (public and private) and be of no disadvantage to any student, regardless of where they are enrolled. ACPET encourages the continuation of this policy initiative: sharing these training facilities benefits all and makes better commercial use of these tax payer funded facilities.

The role of QTAMA in managing these arrangements remains an important one and over time, facilities should increasingly be opened up to allow the delivery of training to a range of students across Queensland. For example: larger private providers and those who demonstrate solid trends in student numbers should be given the same long term lease options that TAFE Queensland is afforded. Leasing arrangements should also be seen as an opportunity for the government to offer smaller providers access to high quality facilities so that all students, regardless of where they choose to study, are supported.

Acknowledge that credible industry self-regulation, combined with meeting federal and state requirements, is the best way to promote a diverse, high quality and effective VET system. ACPET members operate under a strict Code of Conduct and Practice. Membership ensures a commitment to professional development and that business, marketing and educational practices are monitored and ethically sustained.

As a professional association, ACPET requires adherence to a member Code of Conduct and Practice that establishes clear standards for membership and provides arrangements for engaging with education brokers/agents and third party deliverers.

The revised Code of Practice has two elements:

i) A Code of Ethics outlines the professional standards expected of education and training providers. Members are required to act with integrity in all dealings with students (past, present and future), employers, and with other organisations. The Code ensures our

members are those who aspire to and achieve quality education. ACPET membership will be and must be a badge of quality, and

ii) A framework that focuses on engaging brokers and agents and has established mandatory requirements for both members and their contractors. The accountability and responsibility rests with the provider. The Code of Practice provides them with a guide on how to manage partnerships and brokerage arrangements.

Give preference to training providers that meet the requirements of industry standards as a condition of being listed as a Pre-Qualified Supplier (PQS), with a further requirement to undertake a PQS endorsed health check as a condition of entry.

Membership of an industry association is a sign that training providers are committed to quality vocational education and training. As outlined above, ACPET's Code of Conduct establishes this benchmark and memberships have been, and will continue to be, terminated for non-compliance.

Whilst ACPET supports open access for all providers in a contestable training market, preference to those providers who demonstrate a stronger commitment towards quality and student outcomes should be recognised by the government.

ACPET notes that in recent weeks a Commonwealth Senate inquiry into financial planning ethics called for planners to become members of an industry body — following similar calls from the corporate regulator and others. A similar model for access to contestable funding in Queensland would help ensure only the best results for students.

A requirement of PQS providers to be a member of a peak industry association demonstrably committed to quality education and training would provide government with a more comprehensive risk management framework that would be managed and conducted in partnership with the training sector.

Lead the promotion of Queensland's international education capabilities and capacity, to potential students and markets both on and offshore, ensuring Queensland is identified as a safe, culturally appropriate study destination.

The international education sector has made significant investments in infrastructure and marketing campaigns to attract students from a variety of countries across the globe, many of whom chose Queensland destinations for the lifestyle and training environment. This success has seen Queensland International Education be ranked third on the state's list of exporting industries.

However, the sector has suffered enormous student losses due to a range of contributing factors over the last four to five years that has seen international education ranked fourth and significantly falling behind NSW and Victoria in student market share. The sector needs support and a plan to revitalise the profile of Queensland as a study destination and boost the capability and capacity of the international training sector.

ACPET calls on the incoming government to introduce, implement and resource an international education blueprint that outlines key strategies to reposition education as a key export market, attracting both students to Queensland and opening commercial prospects with offshore businesses.